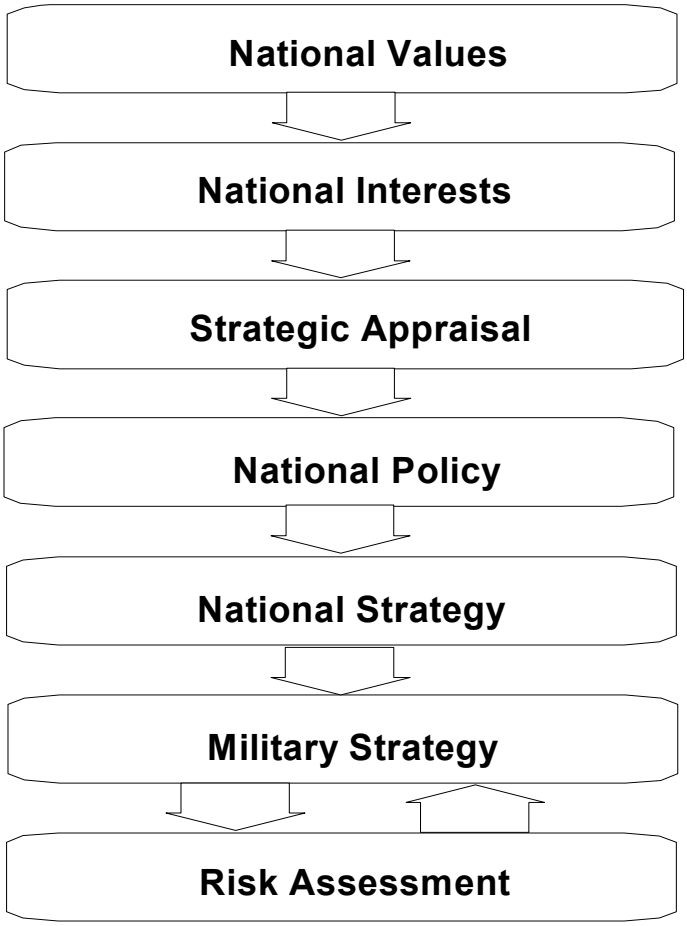
The U.S. Army War College Methodology for Determining Interests and Levels of Intensity

by H. Richard Yarger and George F. Barber, eds.

This reading explains the methodology you will be expected to use at the War College. Learn the concepts, processes and vocabulary because you will use them in later lessons and courses.[1]

While strategy is surely an art it is also a science, in that it follows certain patterns which require a common understanding of terminology, adherence to certain principles, and application of disciplined and creative thought processes. Therefore, the development of national security strategy lends itself to a methodology that can aid the strategist through the major steps in the process from the determination of interests to an effective strategy. This paper provides the Army War College methodology for the development of National Security Strategy and supporting strategies keyed to the elements of national power.

The following illustration outlines the major steps in this methodology.



[1]Adapted from Department of National Security and Strategy, Directive Course 2: "War, National Policy & Strategy" (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1997) 118-125.

"The U.S. Army War College Methodology for Determining Interests and Levels of Intensity," by H. Richard Yarger and George F. Barber, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA, 1997.

This methodology is not a formula that yields a perfect strategy. It is merely a guideline that assists the strategist in considering the multiple components and issues of strategy formulation. Strategy will be developed in keeping with particular features of the time, place, circumstances, and personalities involved. The following guidelines offer an approach to address the complexity of strategy, and offer the strategist hope of achieving the coherence, continuity, and consensus that policy makers seek in developing and executing national security.

National Values

National Security Strategy is derived from an assessment of our national values as they exist in the global environment. U.S. national values represent the legal, philosophical and moral basis for continuation of our system. These values provide our sense of national purpose. They can be found in the nation's founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Values are expressed in Presidential Proclamations as illustrated by the Monroe Doctrine and the Emancipation Proclamation. The current National Security Strategy document identifies core American values. Historical actions and reactions and public opinion often express values since values are situational and are modified over time. Values are also often contradictory of one another. Nonetheless U.S. values are the basis for the development of national interests. A strategist must be cognizant of national values.

National Interests

Nations, like individuals, have interests--derived from their innate values and perceived purposes--which motivate their actions. National interests are a nation's perceived needs and aspirations in relation to its international environment. U.S. national interests determine our involvement in the rest of the world. They provide the focus of our actions, and are the starting point for determining national objectives and the formulation of national security policy and strategy. Interests are expressed as desired end states. Interest statements do not include verbs or action modifiers.

A U.S. interest is stated as:

> National independence and territorial integrity.
>
> ***not*** Protect national independence and territorial integrity.

The survival of an independent Israel.
not Defend Israel from attack.

A region free of internal conflict.
not Assure a region free of internal conflict.

Access to raw materials.
not Protect sources of raw materials.

Unrestricted passage through international waters.
not Secure sealines of communications.

Theorists in political science group interests in categories to show the major types of interests and apply levels of intensity to show the priority or criticality of an interest. Using a composite of the approaches developed by Nuechterlein and Blackwill, the Army War College methodology groups national interests into four categories and three levels of intensity.

Categories are means to help organization. Keep in mind the breakdown is somewhat artificial and an interest may spill over into multiple categories. Thus, while "access to Persian Gulf Oil" as a U.S. national interest has a primary category of "Economic Well-Being", it also ties into other categories such as “Promotion of Values” based on our value of free trade. The four categories used by the USAWC are:

(1) Defense of the Homeland: Refers to protection against attack on the territory and people of a nation-state in order to ensure survival with fundamental values and political systems intact. It generally means physical security.

(2) Economic Prosperity: Refers to the attainment of conditions in the international environment that insure the economic well-being of the nation.

(3) Promotion of Values: Refers to establishment of the legitimacy of or the expansion of the fundamental values of the nation such as free trade, human rights, democracy, etc.

(4) Favorable World Order: Refers to those end states that promote conditions that are favorable to the values and fundamental purposes of the nation, such as stability and democratic governments.

Intensity of interests is a means to determine priority or criticality of interests, recognizing that without prioritization, there is the potential for the mismatch of objectives (ends) with resources (means). The three degrees of intensity are determined by answering the question: What happens if the interest is not realized? The Army War College uses the following three levels of intensity:

(1) Vital--If unfulfilled, will have immediate consequence for critical national interests.

(2) Important--If unfulfilled, will result in damage that will eventually affect critical national interests.

(3) Peripheral--If unfulfilled, will result in damage that is unlikely to affect critical national interests.

The assignment of a "peripheral" level of intensity does not mean necessarily that the interest will not be addressed. It simply provides a relative perspective of the significance of the interest in relation to national well being. Other activities of government use different models. The current National Security Strategy document lists three degrees of intensity—vital, important, and humanitarian. The latter, of course, does not convey a priority.

Strategic Appraisal Process.

After the sorting out of interests by category and intensity using the general criteria above, the next step is the strategic appraisal. The strategic appraisal examines the domestic and international environments to ascertain the forces and trends that affect national interests and determine the resultant threats and opportunities. In assessing the relationship of an external threat to a national security interest, the USAWC uses the following Blackwill criteria to analyze the effects on an interest:

(1) Immediacy in terms of time.

(2) Geographic proximity.

(3) Magnitude.

(4) "Infectious" dimensions.

(5) Connectivity -- How many links of chain of events from threat (situation/event) to core national interest.

It is important that this step take place after the sorting out of interests by category and intensity. The degree of intensity of an interest, in particular, should be determined before a detailed analysis of threats to those interests. It is critical that interests not become a function of a particular threat. If a government begins with a threat assessment before a conceptualization of interests and intensities, it risks reacting to a threat with major commitments and resources devoid of any rational linkage to the relative criticality of interests. Rational cost-benefit analysis should not be allowed to affect the intensity of interest. Although U.S. administrations sensibly make just such cost-benefit calculations, Blackwill points out that:

> …these should be analytically independent from judgments about how important to the United States a particular national security interest is. We may choose to defend a peripheral U.S. interest because it is not costly to do so; the interest nevertheless is still peripheral. Or we may choose not to defend vigorously an important U.S. national security interest because we decide it is too expensive in a variety of ways to do so; the interest nevertheless is still important, and we may well pay dearly for our unreadiness to engage.

The appraisal must be more than a listing of issues or challenges. To be useful, an appraisal must analyze and explain which and in what ways U.S. interests are affected. The assessment should seek to identify opportunities and threats in regard to U.S. interests. As part of this process the appraisal examines the national policy and helps identify recommendations to change existing policies.

The following is an outline for developing a strategic appraisal:

Step 1: Determine U.S. Interests

-- From an understanding of national values and the global environment.

-- By category: defense of the homeland; economic well-being; favorable world order; promotion of values.

-- By intensity: vital; important; peripheral.

Step 2: Identify and Assess Challenges to U.S. Interests

-- Defense Trends (Threats & Opportunities)

-- Economic Trends (Threats & Opportunities)

-- World Order Trends (Threats & Opportunities)

-- Promotion of Values Trends (Threats & Opportunities)

Step 3: Comparison to U.S. National Strategy. Review and analyze where your assessment agrees or differs from the current U.S. national security strategy, and the reasons you disagree.

Step 4: Policy Recommendations. Based on this assessment, develop policy recommendations for national diplomatic, economic, and military policies that must be changed currently and in the future to protect against threats and to take advantage of existing opportunities.

National Policy

To secure our national interests, the national political leadership establishes policies to guide the formulation of a national strategy. National policy is a broad course of action or statements of guidance and objectives adopted by the government at the national level in pursuit of national interests. It may be found in various documents, speeches, policy statements, and other pronouncements made on behalf of the government by various officials. The President, the Secretary of State, and the

Secretary of Defense are key players in the policy making process at the national level. A national security strategy is then formulated based on national security policy.

National Security Strategy

National Security Strategy is the art and science of using all the elements of national power during peace and war to secure national interests. It also may be called National Strategy or Grand Strategy. The Army War College states that formulation of national strategy employs the strategic thought process based on the use of Ends, Ways, and Means. Other agencies may use different models. Regardless the Army War College model can serve as an effective evaluative tool.

Interests are pursued through the use of the nation's **elements of power.** The list of the elements of power is extensive and includes natural determinants and social determinants. Natural determinants include such things as geography, population, and natural resources. Social determinants including such things as the political, economic, military, and informational elements and are particularly adaptable to use by the strategist. The elements of power are the basic means at the national level. From the elements of power are derived the resources for the strategy.

Increasingly, the term "element of power" is used interchangeably with "instrument of power" in official publications. At the Army War College, we differentiate between the two terms by defining an instrument of power as the subordinate component of the element of power. For example, shows of force, blockades and combined training exercises are instruments of the military element of power. Thus **instruments of power** are the theoretical infinite number of policy options or tools that are derived from the elements of power and provide the "ways" the resources will be used. Rarely are they derived from just one element of power. For example, economic sanction is a policy instrument (an instrument of power) that is derived from, at the very least, the economic and military elements of power. In the conduct of specific foreign policy, the United States may employ any or all of its elements of power, alone or in combination with the others. National Security Strategy employs all of the elements of power.

All the elements of power may be applied with a light touch as when diplomats try to convince another country to support one course of action or another. They may also be

applied with a heavy hand as when those same diplomats indicate that use of nuclear weapons is being considered. The military may be used to invade another state or simply to provide a show of force or participate in a confidence building exercise. Power is used to influence, support, enforce or coerce.

Application of a particular element of power may have impact only within its own area or, more commonly, have effects well beyond the particular situation that caused it. In the above example, the announcement of intended use of nuclear weapons would cause military establishments of both countries to be put on a heightened state of alert, political discussions of the terms of mutual security agreements would take place, the stock market would be affected and the resultant stress on citizens would tax health services, worldwide.

Formulate national strategy employing the strategic thought process.

1. National Objectives - ENDS.

2. National Strategic Concepts - WAYS.

3. National Resources - MEANS.

A strategy is derived from and must be supportive of U.S. national interests and policy. From this beginning, a determination is made as to what U.S. objectives (ends) must be accomplished in order to advance the national interests. The strategist considers how the various elements of power (means) should be employed as instruments of power to achieve those objectives. And then, calculates whether or not the U.S. has enough, or can find enough, resources (manpower, materiel, dollars, etc.) (means derived from elements of power) to achieve those objectives. If the objectives do not advance the national interests, if the strategic concepts will not accomplish the objectives, or if resources are lacking to support the strategic concepts, the strategy model is not balanced. An unbalanced strategy model leaves the strategist with two options, reevaluate the entire equation or accept some risk.

The challenges for the strategist are: 1) to determine the best way to project the various elements of power by choosing those instruments of power or "ways" which are both feasible and effective in achieving the objective; and 2) to ensure that all strategies and all elements of power are

supporting, complementary and synergistic wherever possible (or, at least, do not work at cross-purposes). National Military Strategy is derived from national policy and the National Security Strategy.

Military Strategy

National Military Strategy is the art and science of employing the armed forces of a nation to secure the objectives of national policy by the application of force or the threat of force. Military strategy is meaningful only in the policy context outlined above. As Clausewitz noted, war is the continuation of policy by other means. Therefore war, and military strategy, supports the policy of the state in its pursuit of its interests. All military strategy employs the strategic thought process based on the use of Ends, Ways, and Means.

National policy and strategy objectives and guidance must be translated into clear, concise, and achievable military objectives. Military Objectives state what is to be achieved by the military element of power? As a rule of thumb, military objectives should:

-- be appropriate, explicit, finite, and achievable. (Test this by asking yourself if, as a CINC, you would know exactly what you would be expected to accomplish by national leadership).

-- directly secure one (or more) stated interest(s) as expressed in policy.

An effective first step in articulating a military objective is to attach an appropriate verb to each previously identified interest. For example:

- **Interest**: access to raw materials
  Objective: secure access to raw materials

- **Interest**: a region free of conflict
  Objective: deter intraregional conflict

- **Interest**: survival of Country X
  Objective: defend Country X

If no realizable military objective can be articulated to satisfy a given interest, a policy choice to use the military element of power should be questioned.

Military Strategic Concepts are broad courses of action or ways military power might be employed to achieve the stated objective. They answer How? Here is where the originality, imagination, and creativity of the strategist comes into play. As Clausewitz observed, there are many ways to achieve a given end; presumably many can be right, but real genius lies in finding the best. As a rule of thumb:

-- Each military objective must have one (or more) concept(s) detailing how means (resources) are to relate to ends (objectives).

-- Stated strategic concepts represent the preferred options of the possible courses of action considered.

-- Strategic concepts also detail when, where, phasing, sequencing, roles, priorities, etc., as appropriate.

-- Examples:

- **Interest**: Access to Middle-East Oil

- **Objective**: Secure SLOCs to the Middle-East

- **Strategic Concept**: U.S. naval forces and embarked land forces will maintain a periodic presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and Indian Ocean in peacetime; be prepared to provide full-time presence in crisis; and be prepared to achieve naval superiority in the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean in wartime.

Finally, the strategy must have military resources--i.e., military forces and means implied by the objectives and concepts are identified. Military resources are often stated as forces (divisions, wings, naval groups), but might include things such as time, effort, organization, people, etc. As a rule of thumb:

-- Military resources must be identified for each objective and concept articulated.

-- Supportability of forces should be addressed (in terms of strategic lift, sustainability, host nation support, reinforcements, etc.).

-- For Example:

- One Carrier Battle Group (CBG) with an embarked Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) deployed deploy to X ocean on a quarterly basis...

- A permanent Joint Task Force (JTF) ....Two CONUS-based Divisions, one Special Forces Group and two Tactical Fighter Wings, supported by...

Identification of resource implications, while completing the strategy, should be the first step in testing its internal logic. You should now think backward through the process to ensure the forces envisioned are adequate to implement the concepts, that the concepts achieve stated objectives, that the military objectives correctly satisfy the policy objectives and protect the national interests identified, and so forth.

Formulate military strategy employing the strategic thought process. Military Strategy = Objectives + Strategic Concepts + Resources

Generic	Military	Answers
Ends	Objectives	What?
Ways	Concepts	How? (Where & When)
Means	Resources	With What?

Risk Assessment.

As almost no strategy has resources sufficient for complete assurance of success, a final and essential test is to assess the risk of less than full attainment of objectives. Living with risk is part of our business in the modern world, and being able to articulate its extent is the first step in reducing its impact. This thought process applies equally to national strategy, national military strategy, and theater military strategy. Where the risk is determined to be unacceptable, the strategy must be revised. Basically there are three ways:

- Reduce the objectives,
- Change the concepts,
- Increase the resources.

In this last framework you will find most of the strategic issues which confront senior military leadership (the so-called commitments/capabilities mismatch). The ability to relate these issues back to this framework and the strategy, policy, and interests involved is an important aspect of being a strategic analyst.

Conduct a Risk Assessment

The development of national security strategy and national military strategy lends itself to a methodology that can aid the strategist in considering the major steps in the process from the determination of interests to an effective strategy. This paper provides the Army War College methodology for the identification of interests and the development of National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy and is the methodology you will use as a student. You will use the same methodology on a regional basis to conduct your regional appraisal in Course 6.